

A print works and other post-medieval development at 2–18 St Bride Street, 87–88 Farringdon Street, London EC4

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Introduction

The site at 2–18 St Bride Street, 87–88 Farringdon Street, lies north-west of Ludgate Circus in an area defined by St Bride Street, Farringdon Street and Harp Alley (Fig. 1). This article reports on the results of an archaeological excavation on the site undertaken during 2007 and 2008 by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA, formerly known as the Museum of London Archaeology Service or MoLAS)¹ under the site code FRZ06. The excavation, which took place in three phases in advance of and during the redevelopment of the site (Fig. 2), focused on those areas of the site impacted upon by the new building and these were excavated to formation levels. All archaeological material unaffected by the redevelopment was preserved *in situ*.

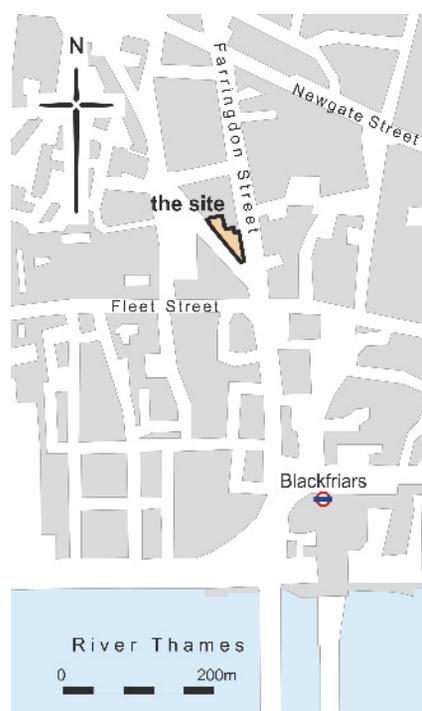


Fig. 1: site location

Following the excavation, a watching brief monitored the remaining construction works.

The archaeological sequence consisted of medieval deposits, 16th–19th-century deposits and cut features and post-medieval buildings, and included evidence for a late 19th-century print workshop.

Medieval period (1080–1480)

The pattern of development of the site in the medieval period was strongly influenced by its close proximity to the river Fleet, which is now buried beneath Farringdon Street. St Bride Street was not built until the later 19th century, and the site lies in the north-eastern part of what was originally a

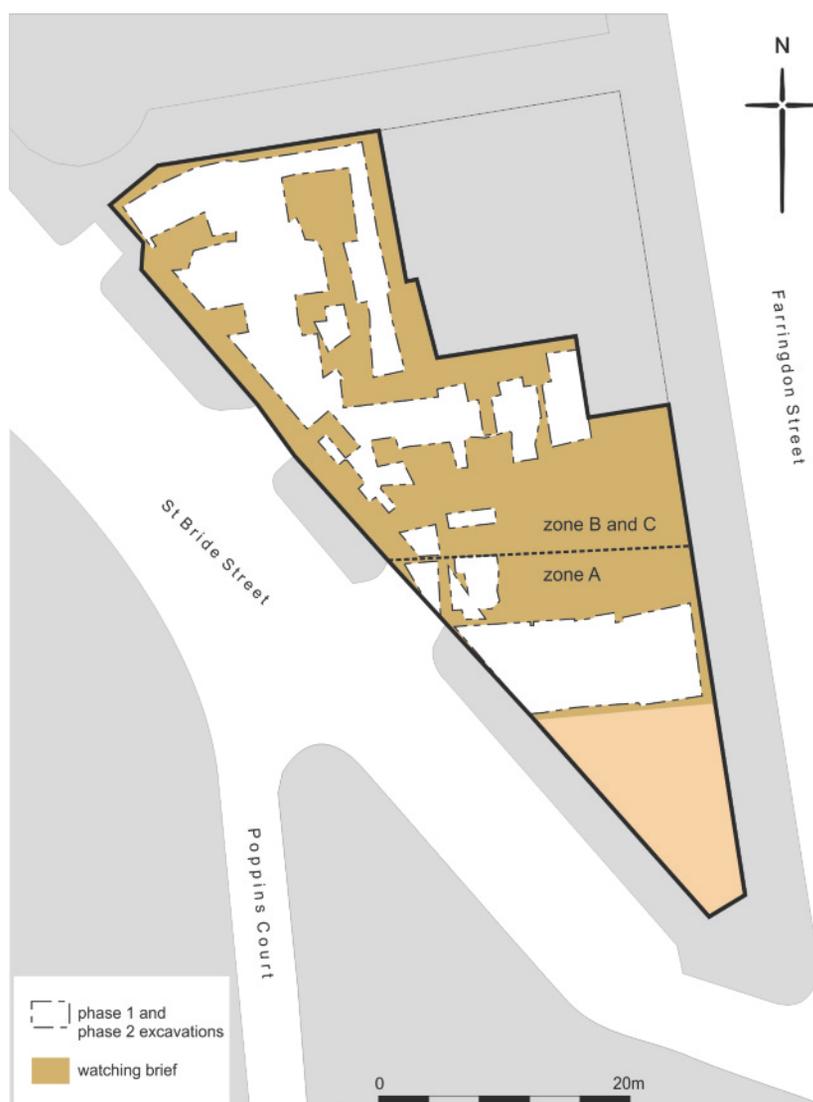


Fig. 2: the areas of archaeological intervention

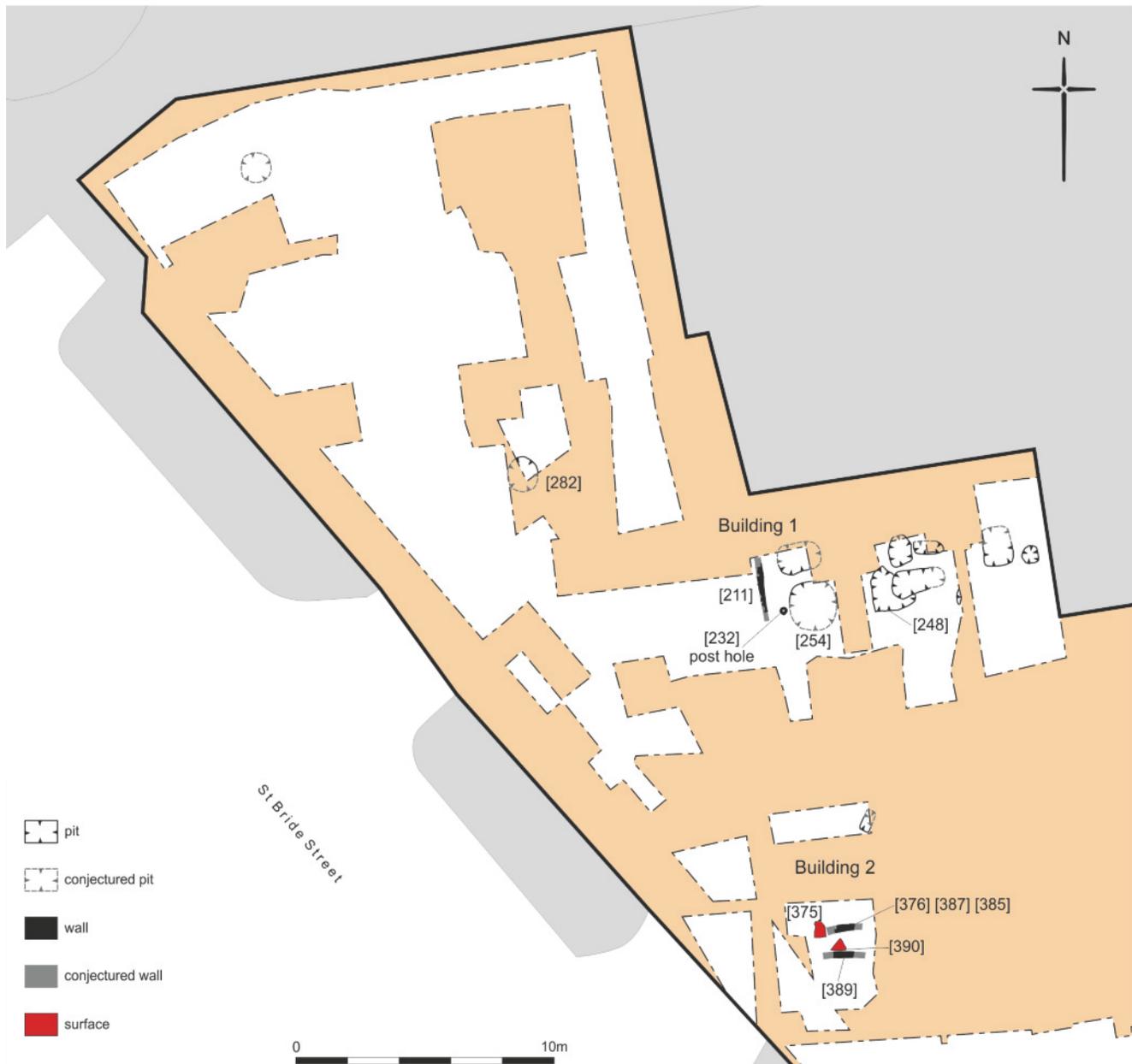


Fig. 3: late 16th–early 17th century features

rectangular plot of land between Shoe Lane and the Fleet. Amongst the documented owners of this plot are the Abbot of Cirencester, whose Inn, the *Popyngaye*, was built within it, probably in the late 13th century.² Attempts to reclaim land close to the Fleet constricted the river's course and it became prone to flooding. Particularly severe floods in 1314–1317 damaged the Fleet banks and infrastructure.³ Nevertheless, it is likely that although most medieval occupation was concentrated towards Shoe Lane or Fleet Street, the area became increasingly built up throughout the period.

Because the excavations did not continue beneath the formation level of the redevelopment, deposits

representing 15th-century ground consolidation were the earliest identified. The post-1400 date was indicated by sherds from cauldrons or pipkins in late London-type wares. However, the dumps also contained a high proportion (81 of the 105 sherds) and wide variety of residual pottery; the earliest was of 12th–mid-13th century date (and included a sherd of 12th-century coarse London-type ware), but most sherds were 13th–15th century in date, with much discarded after c. 1350. Fabrics represented were mostly in common domestic use across London. Examples of Surrey-Hampshire border ware, the dominant fabric in London c. 1350–1500,⁴ included remains of three jugs and a large flared bowl/dish with a flat-topped rim. Two

of the three jugs are of a type usually fitted with a bung-hole and used in brewing.⁵ A jug in late medieval Hertfordshire glazed ware (AD 1350–1400) is representative of good quality medieval tableware.

A large volume of peg tile, mostly glazed and almost certainly medieval in date, was retrieved from post-medieval deposits. A late-14th-century Penn type floor tile of a previously unpublished design represented probable demolition of a church or monastic building.

Early post-medieval period (1480–1650)

Fleet Street is synonymous with the printing and newspaper industry. The first evidence for the printing industry in the area dates comes from 1500 when

Wynkyn de Worde, a printer and publisher, moved to Fleet Street from Caxton's Old House in Westminster. His office was on the south side of the street near the entrance to Shoe Lane, where there were also a couple of bookbinders. By the time of his death in 1535 he had printed some 800 books. Other influential early printers included Richard Pynson Norman, who moved to Temple Bar, also in 1500, and who was made printer to the king in 1508. By 1530–4 William Rastell, the nephew of Sir Thomas Moore, was printing at a house in nearby St Bride's Churchyard.⁶

By the late 15th century, the Fleet had been ignominiously down-graded to the status of Fleet Ditch and in 1463 the Common Council banned the use of latrines over it. In 1502, the scouring of its course down to the Thames enabled boats to navigate up to Holborn Bridge,⁷ but this provided only a temporary solution. Areas close to the Fleet may well have remained insalubrious. Although London's population grew rapidly during the 16th century and areas between the City and Westminster became increasingly built-up, cartographic evidence⁸ suggests that the site area remained an open space. This is corroborated by the archaeological sequence (Fig. 3). Over 1m depth of dumped deposits, principally over the northern part of the site, dated to c. 1480–1600, represent continued land consolidation or reclamation. The insubstantial remains of the earliest buildings recorded on the excavation (Buildings 1 and 2), were

recorded over these dumps. Building 2, which consisted of an east–west oriented brick wall ([389]) and part of a cobbled surface ([390]) can be dated by pottery associated with its construction to c. 1570–1650. The bricks themselves dated to 1450–1550 and must be reused. Building 2 appears to have remained in use for an extended period as at least three phases of further brick work ([375], [376], [383] and [385]) were recorded. The extant remains of Building 1 comprised a red brick wall [211] and an adjacent brick-packed post hole [232], but any surfaces had been robbed. Although the make-up deposits for Building 1 dated to the late 15th–16th century and its brickwork to 1450–1500, it is likely that these bricks too are reused and that Building 1 also dates to no earlier than the late 16th century. The reclamation dumps were also cut by 14 rubbish pits, mostly located to the north of the site where truncation was less extensive, which dated to 1580–1630. Three of these pits ([248], [254] and [282]) contained many cattle horn cores, evidence for butchery-related local industry. Cumulatively, the buildings and pits seem to represent a fairly rapid increase in the density of occupation towards the end of the 16th century.

Pottery

Over 600 sherds of pottery from the period, mostly spanning the 16th–early 17th centuries, with transitional groups dating to the late 15th–early 16th centuries, were retrieved. Surrey-

Hampshire border ware and London-area redware together accounted for about two-thirds of all sherds.

Border wares were predominantly whitewares with green or clear glaze, comprising flanged dishes, tripod pipkins, porringers, drinking jugs, chamber pots, colanders, bowls of various forms and sizes, a money-box and part of a fuming pot. Two bowls were recorded: a single-handled flared form with incised decoration around the rim, typical of the late 16th-century output at Farnborough Hill, and a flared form without a handle. Some red border ware in a similar range of forms was also present. Cups and beakers in early fine whiteware fabric, as made at Farnborough Hill c. 1480–1550, were also found.

London-area redwares typically comprised kitchen and household items, with the 16th-century fabric most common. Cooking vessels were predominant, including cauldrons and tripod pipkins, bowls, dishes, storage jars and jugs. A near-complete jug represented a common form in the local redware fabric, whilst slipped redware included a near-complete chamber pot or handled jar and a large flanged dish with green glaze.

Harlow area fine redwares included clear-glazed mugs, cauldrons or pipkins and a porringer. Black-glazed wares from the same source included mugs of various types and there was also a sherd from a jug in Metropolitan slipware. Part of a dish in tin-glazed ware dated to the late 16th–17th century, whilst part of a flask in Martincamp-type ware dated after c. 1600.⁹ Continental imports included jugs and drinking vessels in Frechen and Raeren stoneware from the Rhineland, with sherds from two cauldrons in Dutch red earthenware.

Part of a heating stand in plain redware was retrieved. This may have been used in distilling. A similar vessel was recently found in Shoreditch High Street, with other examples known, for example, from Lambeth Hill.¹⁰

Sandstone cylinders

Of particular interest were a number of sandstone cylinders, all but one of which were recovered from early post-medieval deposits (Fig. 4). These cylinders were typically between 80–



Fig. 4: the stone cylinders

97mm in length and 45–79mm in diameter, although there were some variations. Each cylinder had a small square hole bored lengthways through the middle, although one large cylinder (120mm diameter) had a square hole that stopped just short of one end. Part of an iron rod threaded through the cylinder survives in one of the square holes. This cylinder also exhibited a series of shallow longitudinal grooves which also covered the surviving end. The outer surface of each of the cylinders was either straight or slightly curved (particularly near the ends). Two broken cylinder fragments appeared to have been re-used, possibly as paving.

The function of these cylinders is uncertain. It seems fairly certain that all would have had metal rods threaded through them and would have been capable of rotating. An industrial function seems most likely and it may be they are linked with the early printing industry, possibly as rollers for pressing down paper onto printing blocks, but this to date remains unproven.



Fig. 5: the 1873 Ordnance Survey map of the area showing the British School

The later post-medieval period, 1650 onwards

In the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1666, the Rebuilding Acts of 1667 and 1671 authorised the straightening of the Fleet ditch to the south of Holborn Bridge and reconstruction as a canal over 10m wide.¹¹ Christopher Wren was in charge of the overall design, as

Surveyor General of the Royal Works. The canal was complete by the end of October 1674 and can be seen on Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1677. However, despite all efforts to keep the Fleet clean and navigable, the canal was arched over from Holborn Bridge to Fleet Bridge in 1733 and in 1766 the

river from Fleet Bridge to the Thames was also covered over.¹²

The growth of the local print industry continued throughout the later post-medieval period. In 1702, the first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, was published in Fleet Street. The Ordnance Survey map of 1873 shows

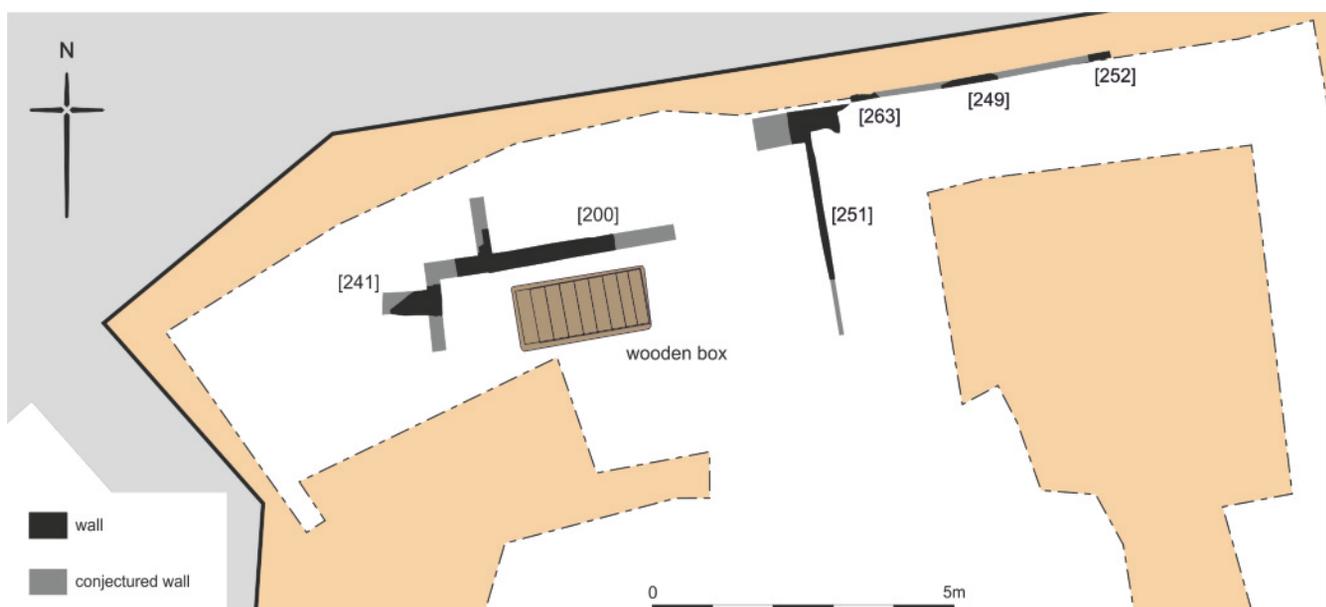


Fig. 6: the archaeological remains along the Harp Alley frontage

ST BRIDE STREET

innumerable printing offices and warehouses surrounding the site area. It also shows the British School for boys girls and infants (founded c. 1834) east of the corner of St Bride Street and Harp Alley (Fig. 5). The British and Foreign Schools Society evolved from Joseph Lancaster's early-19th-century system for the education of the poor. The Harp Alley School was founded, amongst others, by Richard Taylor (1781–1858), a Unitarian and social reformer who believed increased scientific knowledge was capable of bringing people closer to God.

Richard Taylor is a person of some interest in the history of the local printing industry, and his journals are held by the St Bride printing museum.

Taylor built up a printing and publishing house, with premises off Fleet Street, that within 50 years of its foundation "had become London's (indeed Britain's) largest scientific printer and publisher".¹³ Among his publications were the anonymous texts compiled in 1830 by Elizabeth Fry for her prison school.¹⁴

Although the excavations defined the remains of at least 15 buildings dating from the mid-17th century onwards, almost all the earlier buildings were too fragmentary to relate to cartographic sources. Consequently it is the later buildings which are of most interest. Three sections of an east–west aligned, 19th-century brick wall [249], [252], [263], with part of a north–south

oriented wall [251] running off to the south, were recorded along the Harp Alley frontage (Fig. 6). These foundations appear to relate to the property immediately to the east of the school.

Print workshop

Documentary evidence suggests the Harp Alley school was up for sale by 1880.¹⁵ The excavations found evidence for a late 19th-century print workshop within the area of the former school building. A lead-lined wooden box, approximately 2m long and 1m wide, was set onto a concrete foundation (Fig. 7). In the base of the box wooden slats overlay the lead lining. To the north and west of the box, brick walls [200] and [241] were contemporary with the box and belonged to the building within which it was set.

A diverse and fascinating selection of printing material was recovered from the box. Most of the material was of white metal (presumed to be 'type metal') some of which was damaged or corroded, but some copper alloy items were also retrieved. Most notable components recovered were blocks for a variety of publications and letterheads, as well as some single type characters.

Most numerous of the items were a number of 'type-metal' bars typically c. 21x10mm in section and up to 160mm in length (Fig. 8a), and rectangular strips and squares of sheeting down to less than 1mm in thickness. These items were probably used as spacers in setting out type. Some of the bars have an oblique face and there are often small grooves lengthways. A white, powdery material within some of the grooves is probably plaster-of-Paris, which was used as a separator in the printing trade.

A number of single characters of type were found, all of which had one or more transverse grooves for fixtures on one side. Single letters were typically c. 23mm long with sections of varying size and c. 2 x 1mm grooves for fixing into the plate. Letters represented were **h**, large, sans-serif **H** (section 6x6mm), sans-serif **K**, **I**, **n**, **o**, **O**, (?)**O** or (?)**C** and a sans-serif **S**. Other characters were a full stop (Section 8 x 2mm) and a semi colon.



Fig. 7: photograph of the wooden box under excavation

Rectangular plates of various sizes contained legible or partially legible headings and addresses. One plate read G? COZENS & COMPY. *Milliner(s)* 32, 34, 40 & 42 EDGWARE RD. W1 (Fig. 8b). Other examples included ABOUT the WORKS and Wants * / of The MIDDLESEX HOSPITAL, another

read, WRIGHT, BRISTOL / LONDON / SIMPKIN MARSHALL / HAMILTON KENT & SON / LIMITED, whilst other plates read, JOHN LODER / STATIONERS' HALL / WOODBRIDGE.

Also present were plates for proprietary labels including one reading **BOTTLED BY** and another reading **THE**

VENDOR from part of a circular border. Another label appeared to be for a pack of high-quality packing paper and depicted two opposed sphinxes on pedestals within a highly ornate border and had legible script reading **MOORLEIGH 1lb, VELLUM WOVE 6½d, and Qualityed.**



Fig. 8: selected typesetting items: a) spacer bars; b) Cozens & Compy; c) the miniature Financial Times; d) the railway timetable

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A rectangular plate depicted the front page of the *Financial Times* in miniature, with several small adverts in seven unequal columns (Fig. 8c). The newspaper routinely had adverts but no news on the front page. Two plates contained railway timetables with destinations listed one to a line. One plate reads Bickley, Bromley, Shortlands, Ravensbourne, Beckenham Hill, Bellingham, Crofton Park, Nunhead, Peckham Rye, Denmark Hill and Loughboro' Junc, Elephant & Castle and St Paul's, whilst the other reads the route in the opposite direction (Fig. 8d).

Eight of the plates contained fairly legible figurative motifs. One rectangular plate with a rectangular well was filled with degraded, superficially cracked black wax identified as beeswax. This plate depicted part of a long-necked bird with hints of lettering on the middle part of the body and part of another large bird with smaller ones at the base. A second plate depicted a shield and a lion rampant within an ornate, right-angled border, whilst another seems to depict a religious scene within a masonry building, with a figure that may be the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child facing three long-robed figures.

One of the plates was slightly asymmetrical and had been originally attached to an accompanying block of wood by six holes. This plate had a representation of complex, rounded/rotary machine parts with hatched shading and the words **ALLIX PATENT**. Other plates depicted a seated figure in medieval style robes with a hat, a laced shoe, drapery, and possibly a dish with a lid.

Some of the plates have tiny legends integrally cast, set in shallow wells on the sides, giving details of the founder of the type. One plate has **STEPHENSON BLAKE & Co**, whilst another reads **S B & Co**. This company, which originated in Sheffield in 1818, had an extremely high reputation within the industry, working to 1/5000th of an inch as a matter of course and producing type that was considered the most precise in the UK. The company styled its name as Stephenson Blake and Company from 1841. A London warehouse was opened in 1865 to supply the demands of Fleet Street

newspapers. They moved to larger London premises on Aldersgate Street in 1871 and maintained a presence in the street until the 1960s.¹⁶

All the evidence indicates that the material in the print workshop cannot be earlier than the late 19th century. The *Financial Times* was not in circulation before 1888,¹⁷ whilst the inclusion of the stations between Ravensbourne and Crofton Park (the Catford Loop) dates the railway timetables to July 1892 or after.¹⁸ St Paul's station was built in 1886, before being renamed Blackfriars in the 1930s.¹⁹ Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co were a London publisher, publishing throughout the 1890s and at least until 1911.²⁰

Archaeological excavations in London have recovered little evidence of the print industry. A few pieces of print were recovered from an excavation near Ludgate Hill (VAL88) and there are a few other isolated finds from London including some 17th-century items from the Inner Temple.²¹ The present finds, provide material evidence of the commercial connections of an unidentified London printing firm in the late 19th century. They do not expand our knowledge of the technical processes of the period, though the survival of some of the items of highly specialised equipment, such as the wooden blocks to which two of the plates were attached, is rare.

Pottery

Most of the recovered pottery assemblage was from later buildings and structures and dated to the 18th and 19th centuries. The assemblage included a large number of dining and teawares, dominated by popular 'willow' and 'wild rose' patterns. Tin-glazed wares (18th century) were present, including remains of four plates typical of the mid-18th century, as were domestic vessels in Surrey Hampshire border redware and London area redware. Related everyday forms were also found in yellow ware, some with slip decoration, and in plain refined white earthenware. Distinctive decorative wares were present as remains of bowls and a teapot in white salt-glazed stoneware and part of a Bartmann jug in Frechen stoneware were retrieved from dumped deposits.

Pottery from 19th-century deposition was from inexpensive common household forms including transfer-printed dining and teawares and a teapot in Rockingham-type ware. Part of a small figure in refined whiteware is represented by the head of greyhound; it would have been used as an ornament or possibly a toy. Ginger beer and other bottles and jars in English brown salt-glazed stoneware provide standard storage vessels. Also found was part of a possible stoneware water filter. A fragmentary mustard pot in French tin-glazed ware retains part of the inscription: 'Le Moutarde...vert-pre...yraud...a Paris'.

Clay tobacco pipes

Ninety-two clay tobacco pipe fragments including twenty-one bowls, seventy stems and a mouthpiece were recovered from the site. Thirteen pipe fragments bore makers' marks and eight were decorated. The pipes range in date from c. 1680 to the turn of the 19th century, and were probably all of local manufacture. A single bowl fragment was decorated with the arms of the city of London. One pipe fragment was marked WA, possibly representing William Allen (1707–1736). Another fragment was marked WO, possibly for William Ongar (1809). A pipe stem was marked ELLIOT LAMBETH representing the maker Charles Elliot, (1840–1870) whilst another pipe was marked HH, possibly representing Henry Hensher of Stepney (1848–1862).

Glass

A fairly large assemblage of late post-medieval glass was recovered. One onion bottle and a probable onion bottle were dated to the late 17th–early 18th century.

Mid-18th-century finds comprise the complete base of a dark green glass octagonal bottle and single sherds from a case bottle, possibly for gin, and possible mallet or squat cylindrical bottle. Although polygonal bottles had been made before the 18th century, their production became much easier with the introduction of the first one-piece moulds c. 1730, which allowed bottles to be formed in standard sizes. When cool the pontil was attached to the base and the rim finished in the usual way.²² The present example is of

rectangular form with bevelled corners (the most usual form), with smoothed, slightly recessed base (max dimensions 82 x 53mm),²³ and is probably from a half measure. As it is rather small it may perhaps have been an early medicine bottle rather than a half measure wine bottle; it probably dates to c. 1730–50 when bottles in clear or aqua glass were made, often with embossed lettering.²⁴

Remains of up to seven 19th-century cylindrical bottles in dark green glass, including four different bases and a blob and bead rim on a bulbous neck were also found. The assemblage contained remains of two French wine bottles in a pale green glass. One is a long necked form with deep straight-sided collar just below the rim which could be from a champagne or burgundy bottle.²⁵ The other is a complete base with a very high, flat-topped kick,²⁶ the underside of which has a large projecting bubble.

Other bottles found were probably all of 19th-century date. A complete mould-blown bottle of near colourless natural green glass was found within the wooden box in the print workshop. The bottle was of a flattened oval form, wider at the shoulders than at the base, while the front face is embossed with the letters 'I.S.MANLEY' within a vertical rectangular. The letter 'M' also appears in a smaller panel in the recessed base. This bottle probably contained spirits,²⁷ but could have been used for medicine or a liquid for household use. It is unclear whether the word Manley refers to the manufacturer

or the Manley area in Cheshire. The bottle dates to AD 1850–1920.

Also retrieved was the base of a 19th-century (milk?) bottle in clear glass with the embossed lettering: 'X990', 'C H 25', and 'UGB' within a triple beaded border. Remains of phials included an 18th-century lop-sided cylindrical phial in natural green glass and part of a small, narrow mould-blown 19th-century phial in colourless glass.

Conclusions

Although the excavations at 2–18 St Bride St, 87–88 Farringdon Street were limited in scope, they were able to throw some light on the post-medieval development of a specific area west of the river Fleet and the City of London, from ground consolidation and local industry to increasing development and urbanisation.

The site produced one remarkable finds assemblage of late-19th-century items relating to the printing trade. Given the significance of the locality in the development of the print industry, this is of considerable interest, particularly as the printing trade has hardly figured at all in previous archaeological work in Britain and there is no developed archaeological agenda as yet for evidence relating to this key post-medieval trade.

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Andy Daykin has worked in archaeology in London since 1995 and been a Senior Archaeologist with MOLA since 1999. His wide experience includes the supervision of a wide range of Roman and medieval sites.

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